

Jam: Lawmaker wants toll reduced for locals

Transportation to set up a reduced toll for local motorists.

Cathcart said southern New Castle County motorists, if they choose to use Del. 1 from Boyds Corner to the Biddles Corner toll plaza, must pay \$1 cash for about a two-mile trip. That's the same price as a nearly nine-mile ride from south of Odessa to the plaza, the length of the new bypass.

Motorists using the E-ZPass electronic collection system get a 15-cent reduction, but Cathcart said that isn't enough. "We're ... punishing the local residents," he said.

Cathcart said a reduced toll at Boyds Corner might encourage local residents who commute north to use Del. 1. That would ease the traffic on U.S. 13, which has seen backups as motorists tried to use the old highway and ramps connecting it to Del. 1 at the canal.

He said if he can't convince DelDOT Secretary Anne Canby to establish a locals-only rate, he may try to enlist other lawmakers to help push legislation through the General Assembly next year.

DelDOT officials don't yet know how many vehicles are using U.S. 13 and the ramps to and from the old highway, but Ackles acknowledged it's probably more than they expected.

DelDOT anticipated 30,000 vehicles using the relief route each day, with 20,000 a day on U.S. 13 in southern New Castle County.

Since Nov. 24, when 40,675 vehicles used the new road, an average of about 22,500 vehicles have used

Del. 1 daily, according to DelDOT traffic counts.

Figures for U.S. 13, which were collected the past two weeks, should be ready this week.

"We realized there would be a shift in traffic to avoid the toll," Ackles said. "However ... we probably underestimated how many people were going to avoid the toll by using [U.S.] 13 in the beginning."

It was apparent soon after the tolls went into effect that scores of motorists were opting for the free route.

Traffic jams occurred along Lorewood Grove Road, where a southbound ramp connects the Del. 1 bridge and U.S. 13, allowing motorists to skip the toll plaza.

Jams also occurred along northbound U.S. 13, as motorists waited to use the free ramp over the canal.

Ackles said DelDOT has since modified the timing of traffic signals near the ramps, erected signs that give motorists the option of using the old St. Georges Bridge and created a second northbound lane using the road's shoulder — all in an effort to ease the traffic flow.

Ackles said that when U.S. 13 reconstruction is finished this week, both lanes in each direction will be restored to their original configuration.

Also, a 1,400-foot-long left-turn lane at the free northbound ramp — 800 feet longer than originally planned — will allow up to 10 tractor-trailers and 40 cars to line up without blocking other traffic.

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